

That wasn't a sensible way to store cents

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers more questions about coins and paper money.

Q—My grandfather stored his Lincoln cent collection—including the 1909-S VDB and other key dates—in a blue Whitman coin folder. Sadly, the back sides of several coins are covered with green crud and black dots. What can we do to restore a “natural look”?

B.N., Chicago

A—Not much. The basic coin folders aren't ideal for long-term storage of rare Lincoln cents. The “tails side” of each penny touches the folder, which quickens the chemical process that causes discoloration. Also, it's likely that grandpa's coins were stored in a damp area, another mistake. You could remove the green slime, but your cleaning would give the copper coins a false shine.

Q—You should let your readers know that it's still possible to find silver coins. In the past two months, I've uncovered about five ounces of silver by checking the half dollars I get in rolls from my bank. The take so far is 32 Kennedy half dollars dated between 1965 and 1969.

A.A., Evanston

A—Thanks for the suggestion. Halves made during those years

contain .15 of an ounce of silver per coin, worth about 60 cents at current precious-metal prices. Half dollars from 1964 or before hold .36 of an ounce of silver, or about \$1.50 worth of metal per coin.

Q—Inside an antique desk we found a crumpled \$100 bill from the Republic of Texas dated May 29, 1839, with serial number 663. What's the history of this item?

G.T., Elgin

A—Texas declared its independence from Mexico in 1836. The republic issued its own currency until about 1845, when Texas became the 28th state.

Today, Republic of Texas money is a popular item on the hobby market. But souvenir dealers have made thousands of reproductions of many Texas bills, including the \$100 note with serial number 663. Your copy has no value as a collectible.

Q—Are two-cent pieces special? We have one such coin, scratched and somewhat worn, dated 1865.

P.L., Darien

A—Your item might sell for as much as \$7 unless the scratches are deep and unsightly. Uncle Sam made such coins for 10 years starting in 1864, in part to help relieve a shortage of hard

money caused by the Civil War. Nearly 14 million such coins were minted in 1865.

Q—How much could we expect to get from a dealer for our Eisenhower silver dollars of the 1970s?

C.D., Chicago

A—The government used copper and nickel—not silver—to make Ike dollars for circulation. Specimens that show even the slightest wear have no special value as collectibles, regardless of the date.

Q—I'm getting started in coin collecting after a 20-year absence. Would it be better to buy one valuable coin for \$5,000 or 50 less rare coins for \$100 each?

C.F., Des Plaines

A—Over the past two decades, rare-date coins in the top condition categories have done best as investments. But you might get more enjoyment out of owning a larger number of lower quality rarities.



Want to know how much your old coins are worth? Send your queries to Roger Boye, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply and allow at least three weeks for the answer.